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Pentecost 5c
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Confess Who Jesus Is Luke 9:18-24

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word from God through which the Holy Spirit strengthens us to keep following Jesus is Luke 9

While Jesus was praying alone, his disciples were with him. He asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

They answered, "John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. And others say that one of the prophets of old has risen."

He said to them, "But you, who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

He warned and ordered them not to speak about this to anyone. "It is necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things, to be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, to be killed, and on the third day to be raised."

The he said to all, "If anyone is determined to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross day by day, and follow me. For whoever is determined to save his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life because of me, he will save it." (Luke 9:18-24).

This is the word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior, and especially you, Rachel, Courtney, Evan, and Seth, our 2013 high school graduates:

Soon you'll be packing up for college, deciding what to bring and what to leave. Where does Jesus fit in to that? Will you leave behind the Jesus you've learned to know and believe and instead adopt new views about him that fit better with college life? And even if at this time you're ready to say, "Of course not!" that's a lot hardy to stick to when pressured by friends or persuaded by the high sounding ideas promoted in the classroom.

So prepare yourself now to stand firm and confess who Jesus is. It's not necessary to be able to win arguments and prove your point. In the end, faith is not something we argue but something we show. Show your faith by confessing who Jesus is -- the one, true Jesus. For you see, Jesus is not like a piece of play dough that you can mold into any shape that fits your fancy. Rather Jesus is a solid, unchanging rock. Either we are built on him according to his good and gracious will, or we are crushed beneath him because we refused to confess him.

So prepare yourselves, dear friends, to boldly confess who Jesus is. He is the Christ, whom God sent. He is your Savior, whom you follow.

A. The Christ, whom God sent

The disciples had been with Jesus for over two years. In half a year or so, Jesus

would die. Would they be ready to confess him? Are you ready, now that you're heading away from home?

To prepare them, Jesus asks who the crowds say he is. They have various answers, but it boils down to that Jesus is a great prophet but nothing more. Still today that's the kind of answers you'll find. Many will honor Jesus as a great man and a wonderful inspiration. They will claim to respect his words and to marvel at his great love. They may even try to follow his example and hold him up as a role model. But notice how all this leaves him as just another man.

What makes what they say about Jesus almost sound good is when we hear others out there claiming that Jesus is more of a myth than anything else. They say that most of what the Bible says about him was invented by early church leaders to keep control over the people. Never mind that this doesn't fit the actual history. It fits their theories.

But as you well know, dear friends, to confess who Jesus is means more than to confess that he existed or to confess that he was a great man, a wise teacher, or an inspiring role model. What did Peter say when Jesus asked the disciples, "But what about you? ... Who do you say I am?" (Luke 9:20 NIV84). Peter answered clearly and directly, "The Christ of God" (Luke 9:20 NIV84).

Jesus is the Christ. That's not just a second name for him. That's his job description. Christ is the Greek word for Messiah, which is the Hebrew word for Anointed One. In Bible times, people were anointed with oil to do very special work. For example, the young David was anointed with oil by the prophet Samuel to show that he would be king. But the Christ was not anointed with mere oil but with the Holy Spirit in full measure to do the work that no mere human being could do. What was the work the Father had sent his Son, Jesus, to do as the Christ? To save sinners, to save you and me.

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, promised throughout the Old Testament. Jesus is the Christ. He is the anointed King who rescued us by crushing Satan's power as the Lord had promised Adam and Eve. He is the anointed Priest who offered himself as the Lamb of God, the only sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world. The Old Testament sacrifices were a shadow of what the Christ had come to do. He is the anointed Prophet. He not only spoke a message from God as the prophets of old did; he himself was the message, the Word. For he comes from the Father's side full of grace and truth. He alone makes the Father known. He is the Christ.

A mere man, even a perfect, holy man, could not have done the work of the Christ. He could not have saved sinners. But Jesus is the eternal, almighty God. The Father sent him on this mission as the Christ. So the divine Son became a full human being as well. Only as the God-man could Jesus carry out the work of the Christ. Only as the God-man could he save you and me.

Who is Jesus? He is the Christ, whom God sent. Confess who Jesus is. Confess that is your God whom the Father sent to do the work no mere human could do, the work that only the Christ could and did do, the work of saving sinners, just as the prophets foretold.

Now because Jesus came on this mission and accomplished this work, he is your Savior, whom you follow. That too is what we confess about who Jesus is.

B. Your Savior, whom you follow

The disciples did not yet have a clear picture of how Jesus would accomplish the work he was sent to do. The crowds as well had very confusing ideas about the work the Christ would do. That's why Jesus tells the disciples to not yet spread this confession that he is the Christ. But after he finishes the work, he will tell them to preach this good news in all the world.

You, dear friends, know well how Jesus did the work of saving sinners. Jesus reveals a few of the details to his disciples at this time. He would suffer many things. He would be tried and rejected by the Jewish ruling council. In fact, he would be killed. That's the way it had to be to fulfill the Scriptures and rescue sinners. And on the third day he would rise from the dead. That too must happen as the Scriptures foretold. For his resurrection truly proves that he has done the work of saving sinners. Without his resurrection, we are lost in doubt and unbelief. But Easter is God's seal of approval on what Jesus has done. God has accepted his payment for our sins in full. God has declared sinners not-guilty because of Jesus' life and blood. Jesus has conquered death. He is your Savior, your only Savior from sin and death.

Follow him. Don't simply pay him lip service but follow him. Confessing who Jesus is means more than saying the right things. Your actions will show your faith or lack of faith. So confess that Jesus is your Savior by following him.

What does that mean to follow Jesus? Jesus explains: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:23, 24 NIV84).

Take to heart his words. He's not talking about giving up this or that thing. He's talking about denying your very self and placing God's will first. My wants and desires, my thoughts and opinions, my choices and decisions, even my sense of fairness and of right and wrong -- all take second place to what my God says.

How difficult that is especially when believing and doing what our God says brings troubles and losses in life! Those are the crosses. When you live your faith as you leave home and go out into the world, you're going to be different than the world. You're not going to blend in. But instead of compromising, take up your cross daily.

For you see, dear friends, if we live our lives according to our natural way of thinking we will lose everything in the end. For our fallen minds tell us that God will accept us if we're true to ourselves or if we do our best. Or our fallen minds tell us we might as well live it up now since who knows what comes next. Both of those roads end in hell. But instead, if we count everything, even our earthly happiness and existence, as a loss compared to knowing our Savior and following him, then no matter how short or miserable our earthly lot is, we have riches beyond imagination.

For Jesus, your God and Savior, set aside his glory in heaven. He became poor and humbled himself even to death on the cross for you. He was forsaken instead of you. He has paid off your debt of sin. Through his poverty you are rich. For Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, just as said. He rose to bring you eternal life. He alone is your Savior from sin and death. Follow him in faith.

For you see, we confess who Jesus is as we live our lives for him, denying ourselves and placing him first. We show others what a great Savior we have as we take up our cross each day, knowing that his mercy and strength will see us through. Even if we lose all, in Jesus we still have the riches of heaven. Confess who Jesus is every day both at home and away. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.